



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

TERRA-COTTA VASES FROM BISMYA.

BY EDGAR JAMES BANKS,
The University of Chicago.

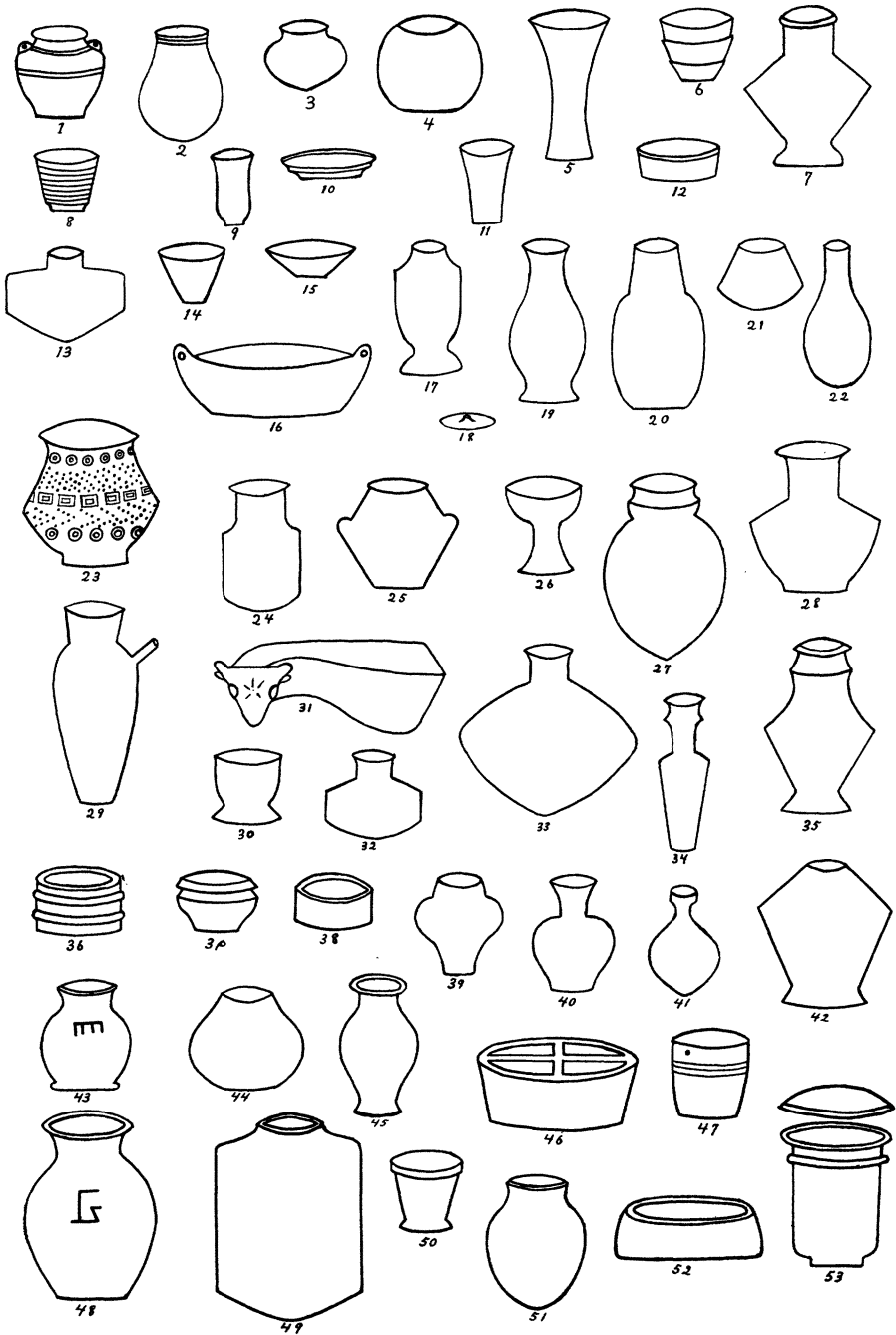
The mounds of Bismya abound in terra-cotta vases, both fragmentary and entire. In places upon the surface the potsherds are strewn so thickly that the ground beneath is invisible. Below the surface, on the slopes of the higher mounds, the houselike tombs of unbaked bricks contained from one to twenty vases each. Everywhere in the dirt the workmen came upon vases concealed with contents once valuable to the owner; in one was a collection of twenty-seven tablets. In the old wells, in the vertical drains, in the corners of the houses, in the plain at the foot of the mounds, in a shaft sunk from the summit of the temple hill, through platforms of temples constructed by Dungi, Ur-Gur, Naram-Sin, Sargon, and by earlier kings whose names are unknown, and through several strata of more ancient ruins, vases appeared. Eight and a half meters below the surface, or five meters below the level of the platform constructed 4500 B. C., were two large burial urns; two meters lower was a smaller one; and 13.20 meters from the surface, on the sand of the desert level, was a thick layer of the fragments of the earliest pottery known. Fully a thousand vases, in a condition more or less perfect, were excavated at Bismya.

In size the vases varied. One, less than two centimeters high, is so minute that it resembles the cup of a child's toy tea-set; at its sides are two minute handles pierced with holes. Others, like reservoirs for the storage of water, or huge burial urns, are nearly a meter in height. In shape they vary as greatly as in size. Some, as Nos. 17, 19, 34, and 35, possess all the grace of the products of the Greek potter. Several have pointed bases that they may stand erect in the dirt, or be placed in a wooden frame, as the modern Bagdad water-jar. Very few, as Nos. 1 and 16, which were provided with handles or projections pierced with small holes, were probably suspended in the temple. Still fewer of the vases are decorated. No. 8, a form discovered in various sizes, has running about it several coils resembling a rope.

No. 6 represents a vase built up of different rings like a pocket drinking-cup, and a few others, as Nos. 1, 37, and 47, are decorated with grooves. No. 23, which is of well-kneaded clay, burned black, is decorated with a series of circles, dots, and squares. Nos. 43 and 48, two large thin-walled vases found near the surface, bear the black marks of their makers or owners, apparently painted with a composition of bitumen. From the general appearance of these two vases, their location when found, and the marks which resemble similar marks upon late bricks, I am inclined to believe that they are post-Babylonian. It may be said that the chief decoration of the Babylonian vase was its form. No. 16 is in the shape of a boat; No. 31, a small terracotta lamp, terminates in the head of an ox; while Nos. 19, 22, 40, 41, and 51 are in form exact duplicates of vases now manufactured in Bagdad.

The Babylonian vase was sometimes provided with a cover consisting of a baked clay disk about fifteen centimeters in diameter. In the center is a small knob pierced with a hole to admit the air; the knob prevented the dust which might accumulate upon the cover from falling easily within. Frequently, when a vase was buried, a finely woven cloth was fastened over its mouth, and then sealed with soft clay. Although the cloth has long perished, the impressions of its threads are still visible upon the clay. No. 53, a funeral urn, is covered with a dish resembling an inverted soup plate.

The material from which the vases were made was the common clay found in most parts of alluvial Mesopotamia. The extent to which it was kneaded varied greatly, probably depending upon the use for which the vase was intended. In the larger, coarser jars and burial urns, finely cut straw was mixed with the clay. From the study of Bismya pottery it is evident that a wheel was employed at every period, yet all of the vases were not turned. No. 43, a form reconstructed from several fragments from the lowest strata of the temple hill, and which therefore dates several millenniums before 4500 B. C., has the appearance of having been formed by placing the clay upon a flat surface, and while the potter shaped it with one hand, he turned the board or flat stone, whatever it was upon which it rested, with the other. This was probably the origin of the potter's wheel; it was but a matter of time when an arrangement was attached to the



board that it might be turned with the feet. Nos. 14 and 15, a common form of the cup of 4500 B. C. and later, bear distinct evidences of the wheel. A peculiarity of the wheel-turned vases is a rough base left as when broken away from the board. Nos. 8, 6, 36, 38, and 49 were built up by hand, either because of the unusual size of some of them, or because a board or stone, the primitive wheel, was not at hand. Some vases, as Nos. 16, 31, 46, and 52, must of necessity, on account of their forms, have been built up.

The prevailing color of the pottery is a yellowish brown, sometimes tinged with green or pink. The clays of Babylonia, when baked, give a variety of beautiful tints. Some of the vases found in the temple shaft were colored on the exterior with a vivid red; yet as a rule it may be said that in the very earliest times the pottery was baked to a deep-brown or black color.

The uses to which the various vases were put is difficult to determine. No. 31 is a lamp. No. 29 is an *ibrik* for washing the hands, identical in form and size with those still used in Babylonia. Nos. 14 and 15 are early drinking-cups, and No. 9 is a drinking-cup of a later period. No. 5 was used for some purpose in the temple service. No. 10 was probably a plate for food. Nos. 6 and 8, when large, were used for the storage of water and grain. Nos. 27, 33, 42, 44, 51, and probably several others, were burial urns. No. 52 is the coffin of a small child of a very late period; while No. 46, which is divided into four compartments, was apparently used for household purposes. Nos. 22 and 23 were probably the common water-jars, yet these and other vases of nearly every form and size were placed in the late Babylonian graves to contain the food and the drink for the dead.

DIMENSIONS OF VASES.

	Height	Length		Height	Length
1. . . .	18 cm.		11. . . .	12 cm.	
2. . . .	51		12. . . .	4	
3. . . .	15		13. . . .	12	
4. . . .	20		14. . . .	9	
5. . . .	45.5		15. . . .	3	
6. . . .	In various sizes.		16. . . .	4	9 cm.
7. . . .	22 cm.		17. . . .	7.5	
8. . . .	In various sizes.			Diameter	
9. . . .	" " "		18. . . .	13 cm.	
10. . . .	3 cm.			Height	
			19. . . .	32 cm.	

DIMENSIONS OF VASES—CONTINUED.

	Height	Length		Height	Length
20. . . .	24 cm.		37. . . .	11.5 cm.	
21. . . .	8		38. . . .	10.5	
22. . . .	9		39. . . .	7	
23. . . .	16.5		40. . . .	9	
24. . . .	12		41. . . .	10	
25. . . .	10		42. . . .	25	
26. . . .	6		43. . . .	21	
27. . . .	20		44. . . .	8	
28. . . .	9		45. . . .	In various dimensions	
29. . . .	25		46. . . .	18 cm.	
30. . . .	30		47. . . .	29	
31. . . .	3.5	7 cm.	48. . . .	26	
32. . . .	8		49. . . .	76	
33. . . .	8		50. . . .	29	
34. . . .	29		51. . . .	37	
35. . . .	20		52. . . .	12	40 cm.
36. . . .	8		53. . . .	24	